

What is claimed is:

- 1 1. An apparatus, comprising:
2 (a) a memory within which is resident a plurality of intelligent agents
3 and distribution control information associated with each intelligent agent that
4 defines distribution rights for such intelligent agent; and
5 (b) program code configured to control distribution of an intelligent
6 agent in response to a request to access such intelligent agent based upon the
7 distribution control information associated with such intelligent agent.
- 1 2. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the program code is further configured to
2 set distribution control information for an intelligent agent in connection with
3 publishing the intelligent agent.
- 1 3. The apparatus of claim 2, wherein the distribution control information is
2 disposed in a header for each intelligent agent.
- 1 4. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the distribution control information
2 defines a publishing level that prohibits distribution of an intelligent agent to another
3 computer.
- 1 5. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the distribution control information
2 defines a publishing level that permits distribution of an intelligent agent to another
3 computer only in response to authorization from product support personnel.
- 1 6. The apparatus of claim 1, wherein the plurality of intelligent agents are
2 each configured to perform product support operations in connection with supporting
3 a computer-related product, and wherein the distribution control information identifies
4 a first intelligent agent as an internal agent configured to execute on a product support
5 computer, and a second intelligent agent as an external agent configured to execute on
6 a customer computer configured to utilize the computer-related product.

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1 8. A method of controlling distribution of an intelligent agent, the method
2 comprising:

3 (a) maintaining in a memory distribution control information that
4 defines distribution rights to each of a plurality of intelligent agents; and

5 (b) controlling distribution of an intelligent agent among the plurality
6 of intelligent agents in response to a request to access such intelligent agent
7 based upon the distribution control information associated with such
8 intelligent agent.

1 9. The method of claim 8, further comprising setting distribution control
2 information for an intelligent agent in connection with publishing the intelligent agent.

1 10. The method of claim 9, wherein the distribution control information is
2 disposed in a header for each intelligent agent.

1 11. The method of claim 8, wherein the distribution control information
2 defines a publishing level that prohibits distribution of an intelligent agent to another
3 computer.

1 12. The apparatus of claim 8, wherein the distribution control information
2 defines a publishing level that permits distribution of an intelligent agent to another
3 computer only in response to authorization from product support personnel.

1 13. The method of claim 8, wherein the plurality of intelligent agents are each
2 configured to perform product support operations in connection with supporting a
3 computer-related product, and wherein the distribution control information identifies a
4 first intelligent agent as an internal agent configured to execute on a product support
5 computer, and a second intelligent agent as an external agent configured to execute on
6 a customer computer configured to utilize the computer-related product.

- 1 14. The method of claim 13, wherein the distribution control information
- 2 further identifies a third intelligent agent as a base agent associated with a particular
- 3 release of the computer-related product.

IBM CORPORATION
ARMONK, NEW YORK 10504
U.S.A.

- 1 15. A program product, comprising:
2 (a) an intelligent agent;
3 (b) a header associated with the intelligent agent, the header including
4 distribution control information that defines distribution rights to the
5 intelligent agent; and
6 (c) a signal bearing medium bearing the header and the intelligent
7 agent.

- 1 16. The program product of claim 15, wherein the header is defined in a
2 markup language.

- 1 17. The program product of claim 16, wherein the header is defined in XML.

- 1 18. A program product, comprising:
- 2 (a) program code configured to control distribution of an intelligent
- 3 agent in response to a request to access such intelligent agent by accessing
- 4 distribution control information associated with such intelligent agent, wherein
- 5 such distribution control information defines distribution rights for such
- 6 intelligent agent; and
- 7 (b) a signal bearing medium bearing the program code.

- 1 19. The program product of claim 18, wherein the signal bearing medium
- 2 includes at least one of a transmission medium and a recordable medium.

- 1 20. The program code of claim 18, wherein the program code is configured to
- 2 access the distribution control information for such intelligent agent by accessing a
- 3 header associated with such intelligent agent, wherein the header is defined in a
- 4 markup language.